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ABSTRACT

This paper is a review of essays written by pupils in some Auckland schools dealing with their views of the urban environment and the recreational facilities available to them. Recommendations are made for overcoming the inadequacies and limitations pointed out by the students. References are made to the philosophies of several adult educators regarding the importance of environment and recreational facilities for a child's cognitive and affective development. Particular attention is given to Rudolph Steiner's theory about the connection between play, art, and work, and the importance of this connection for making decisions about physical environments for children. The special problems of Maori children in the urban environment are also discussed. (EE)

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Adolescent Needs in the Urban Environment

by Gerhard Rosenberg

What do young people think of the urban environment and of the recreational facilities available to them? In order to get some insight into these questions a number of pupils in some Auckland intermediate and secondary schools were asked to write essays on their activities outside the school. Here are some of the things they said:

> The way I spend my time is so boring and dull. The only thing that is exciting is when I take my dog for a walk down a hill. I would like to see some changes around this joint, like a picture theatre, swimming pool, a gym, and some sort of amusement park or fun city. Billiards are the fun I like, but it's only for 16 and over. It should be from 13 up. I'm not really satisfied with the stuff up here. Nothing is real fun, nothing right for teens.

> It's not a question of where, what and who with. It's a question of where you have to, what you can find to do, and who you can find to do it with. There is practically nothing; not even a place where you can meet your friends.

> We have a large number of kids down our street. We usually all play together. Our street is rather new, so we don't have many houses down it. Up the top of the street is quite bare except for a couple of houses being built. So there's lots of grass and mud around. Behind this is a creek which is surrounded in bush, so you can imagine we have a big area to play in. In the weekend we do all sorts of things; we have mud fights, we build huts, we go eeling in the creek, or we play hide and seek, and many other games, so we have quite fun . . . (however) at the moment I have nothing to do really at the weekends, because all the fun we have is now stopped — because of the houses being built in our street. So now, when we try to play, we always get told off by the builders . . . As for our play area it gets smaller and smaller. Soon we will have nowhere; and as there are starting to get many cars up our street, mothers have to start worrying aout their little kids crossing the road.

These extracts reveal a great deal about the way society caters, or fails to cater, for the needs of our children and adolescents. For example, the importance of 'our street' as a play space emerges, and so the significance of traffic volume and control. The desirability of having some land in an 'unimproved' state is also apparent. Other essays indicated that the school timetable does not leave young people with any large or continuous stretches of free time. Thus, especially in winter, in the few hours available to them, they could not easily use the opportunities for recreation that existed, and they were certainly unable to make full use of rarer facilities, like skating rinks, which involved them in a good deal of cross-city travelling.

It is clear that by re-arranging school timetables adolescents from every suburb would be better able to make use of expensive, centrally located facilities. The alternative is to equip every suburb or group of suburbs with a full range of sporting and recreational facilities.

The urban environment

The essays showed that the city centre, as it is now, has not much to offer young people. There are certainly the shops, a few teenage night clubs and dance halls, and the Cook Street Market, which caters particularly for young people. Boystown is a popular club for boys, and it caters for girls as well. But in the main the city ignores children, except, perhaps, during the holidays. Outside the city proper, the airport is of interest to children, as are similar facilities in other countries.

One part of Auckland which seems to have promise as a future young people's centre is the Western Springs area. Already it functions as a family place at weekends, with the zoo, the Museum of Transport and Technology, the lake, sports areas, a stock car racing circuit, the pop concert stage and arena, parking areas, and uncharted waste lands. There is space for much more development which should include eating places and shops, a junior market, facilities for swimming, scrambling, boating, tennis, dancing and discotheques, and also mud-areas, wilderness and wild life areas, play areas for small children, and confidence courses and exercise tracks for young adults. Across the road, the area extends into the municipal golf course. There are two schools, a deep gulley, and plenty of undeveloped land, including a quarry, unfortunately largely filled with controlled refuse. There is good access by car and public transport, and the area will be linked to the motorway system.

But one centre of this kind is not enough. And even if there were other centres of this type, local facilities would still be needed.

Local facilities

The things adolescents most wanted available in their own locality, and not at the end of long and costly journeys, were:

an ice or roller skating rink;
a local cinema, showing general admission or GA films;
a discotheque;
a good park.

As one pupil explained succinctly:

> What do we really need? We need a cinema, a skating rink, good parks, and perhaps even a community centre. We could do with a lot of other things, but we need these things mainly, because everyone is getting bored, so they just get into mischief.

Most of these things are self-explanatory, but the term 'good park' needs defining. It is not necessarily a landscaped park, but rather an area of bush or forest, long in shape, to accommodate a variety of activities: confidence courses, bush walks, horse riding tracks, scrambling tracks and pits. It should include old orchards and vineyards, wild fruit and animals. It should lead from one place to another — preferably the beach. The children expressed a strong feeling of wanting to be free from supervision, which may be

the explanation for the screened areas suggested by several. One boy provided a plan showing a four metre high wall around an area full of trees, which contained a boating lake, a scrambling pit for bikes, a small playground, a shop, a swimming pool, plenty of car parking, and an area where they could build huts and camp under trees. Another was content with a dense belt of trees around his dream area. These parks would require minimal maintenance. Children love mud, mud slides, mud tracks, mud fights. They would be content to make their way over rough country, as long as it could be negotiated at all. They would certainly prefer being hidden to being tidy:

> There aren't many good parks, and what parks there are haven't got what we want, only what is thought good for us. Baa!! We want to enjoy ourselves in our leisure time instead of being under — more or less — supervision.

Transport

The children gave a great deal of attention to their home areas but, as they grow older, transport and the mobility it gives becomes more and more important to them. Transport is also particularly important in new housing areas, where there are few local opportunities. A necessary provision is for reduced public transport fare at all times and on all types of transport. This is as important for adolescents as for pensioners.

Useful work

In our society we have laws designed to prevent 'child labour', laws that are intended to prevent the exploitation of the young. But many adolescents consider school a form of child labour, and sedentary labour at that, which some of them dislike intensely. If they were allowed to do so, young people would probably participate enthusiastically in all sorts of work which, for them, would constitute a form of recreation and an important means of gaining self-respect. Unfortunately, few of our institutions seem aware of this fact or willing to do much about it.

The schools, for example, seem to regard work experience as really only suitable for slow learners, and perhaps, as well, for girls taking commercial courses. The only way other pupils can get work experience is by helping raise funds for the school, that is, by working for a day or two, perhaps at the weekend, and donating their wages to the school.

The children's essays, on the other hand, showed that they took a much more positive view of work. One suggested that 'there should be a regular column in the *Herald* and the *Star*, where paid and unpaid work for children would be advertised.' In fact, the *Star* did on one occasion run a supplement with two pages of advertisements from children. A very considerable proportion of the advertisements were for work wanted, and they were well worded and gave the impression of competence.

Local authorities could benefit immensely from the keenness of young people to do useful work, especially if it led to making something which they themselves could use with their friends. In Auckland, at Avondale, children renovated the old garage which was known as the 'Kids Barn', and they put down a new concrete floor, with the help of some skilled adults. On the North Shore, children built a track as a short-cut to a beach, under the supervision of the borough foreman. One of the essays suggested that children should be able to hire tools and equipment. This is one step further from the notion of supervised use of tools and materials which was intended at the Adventure Playground in Newtown, Wellington. A group of sheds were to be used for carpentry, cycle repairs, trolley building, and also for arts and crafts, under a playleader and voluntary helpers. But a fire swept through the place just before the opening.

The adult role

We can learn a lot from a study of the views and opinions of young people, but adults have a duty to do more than simply listen. They cannot abdicate their responsibility for guiding children as well as for pleasing them. A child develops only in relation to the opportunities he has; only where we cannot guide, may we be content to let children find their own way in this troubled period of rapid change.

Many adult educators of the past started from a very strongly held position hostile to play, a policy typified by that of the American Methodist church, which in 1792 adopted the principles of the German educator Franke:

> Play must be forbidden in any and all its forms . . . The children shall be led to see that all play distracts their hearts and minds from God . . .

Today we would rather follow another educator of the 18th century, Friedrich Schiller, whose educational philosophy is closer to that of our own time:

> Play is an activity that is without inner or external compulsion, yet which appears neither to the observer nor to the participant as a haphazard action.

Schiller believed that there is an innate 'urge to play' in every person, and that this urge is related to the impulse which activates all artistic creativity. The life force and the creative impulse, which desires to give form to that which otherwise remains chaotic, combine in the play impulse, and this impulse is directed towards ends which are experienced as aesthetic, indeed as beautiful. Schiller thus associated education and human development with play and artistic creativity.

> How can you speak of 'mere play' when we all realise that it is in the action of playing, and in that action alone, that man is thoroughly human and reveals his two-fold nature.

To the reader this may seem a paradox, but on this statement the entire theory of creative art, and of the even more complex art of living may safely be based. The Greeks, who were masters in the art of living, believed so much in the dignity of play that their gods were playful. They were idle and unruffled. Our young people would say that they were 'cool'. The point, in any case, is that this link between play and beauty ought to be ever-present in our work for children and adolescents — but it seldom is in practice.

Physical activity

Beauty, as experienced by children, is one of the guidelines. Another is the need for physical activities. The Physical Education Branch of the New Zealand Education Department has produced a chart which shows how vitally important physical reaction and participation is for child development, especially at the ages of 11 to 13. The chart shows the need for 'big muscle activities' at various ages, and shows a sharp peak at 12 years when children need 6 1/2 hours of big muscle activity per day. At 4 years they only need about 4 hours, and again, at 15 1/2 years they need only 4 hours, but when they are at Intermediate School age, they need about 6 hours — yet that is the very time when our education system introduces them to sedentary learning! It follows that there must be compensatory provisions for these children outside the school as well as inside, and time made available to engage in these activities. What makes this problem even more difficult is that children and adolescents spend many hours per week passively watching television, usually because there is nothing better to do, which deprives them of active play time that they cannot afford to lose.

School size

The need for 'big muscle activity' should come into decisions on the size of the schools; we can have many small schools, or a few big schools. If there are a few big schools they will be spaced more widely apart, and children will have to be taken by bus, so losing the opportunity to walk or cycle to school. Intermediate Schools are inevitably taking children from several primary schools, often leading to the merging of 'decapitated' schools, so that again there are fewer schools, and they are further apart, which leads to children who used to walk to school busing. This would not be so bad if we actively compensated for the lost activity and opportunity; where there is no walk to school for example, a skating rink or skateboard alley is more of a necessity then in another area, where children are already more physically extended. This means, of course, that our administrators and planners will have to pay more heed to considerations of this kind, and take less notice of the vocal demands of organized sports clubs, which generally cater for older groups or provide more 'structured' activities. It is a question of who has the greatest need.

Another reason for keeping schools small relates to the increase in the number of 'incomplete homes'. Professor Marie Clay, of the University of Auckland, has found in a recent survey* that there were at least two districts in Auckland where over 30 percent of the school children came from homes which did not have two natural parents. The consequences of this situation are not entirely predictable but teachers in such schools become more like parents, the class more like a family, the school both instruction and social centre. Therefore it must be kept small, so that parents can become involved, and children can get more individual attention. There must never be the feeling that children are milling around the school grounds in a seething mass. We need small schools, or large schools divided into manageably small parts, with small play areas, changes of light and shade, and large trees. Our large schools as they are now, are singularly bleak, probably because large tracts of land are bulldozed clear before they are built. Since children from incomplete families are less likely to be club joiners, a range of unstructured activities should be supported, even if it means subsidizing some private persons to provide opportunities for the children. Free transport may have to be provided so that children can be taken to facilities like skating rinks on a regular basis. In that way the landscapes of their minds can be given permanent landmarks. Paid play-leaders and Community Advisers and permanent centres, such as the 'kids barn', are, of course, very useful, but the fluctuation of population and also of the fashion and impulses at the time requires a flexibility, which can often only be provided by private enterprise. It is a sad fact that public provision often meets a need not when it is greatest, but only when it has passed.

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* Clay, Marie M. and Viviane M.J. Robinson, *Children of Parents Who Separate*, NZCER, 1978.

Nature

Rudolf Steiner always placed great emphasis on what we would now call ecological considerations in the education of the young:

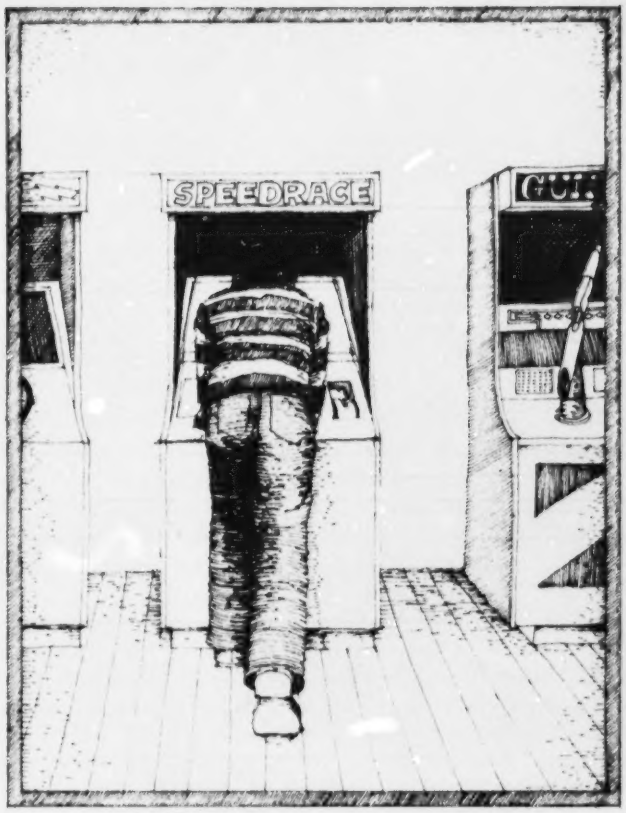
> It is of the greatest importance that from the tenth year to about the twelfth year we should awaken in the child the realisation of the relationship between plants and the earth, and between animals and man. Thereby the child finds a definite place in the scheme of the world, with his entire life and soul, body and spirit . . . Dispense with textbooks. Single plants have no reality, just as a single hair has no reality. Earth and plants belong together. Thus a child realises, that he is standing on a living earth.

Likewise, humans and animals belong together, and it is important that children should have the experience of animals, and generally of living creatures, before the world of inanimate things and thoughts is brought to bear on them.

All this suggests that, as a teaching aid, the natural rather than the man-made environment is vital, at least for the younger child. Trees, in particular, are important. Their very vertical habit encourages the upright posture of the child, and points the contrast to the mainly horizontal posture of most animals. Their organic form is a constant reminder in the context of the geometrical form of man-made structures.

Of course, these ideas are more akin to Greek ideas on education and child development than to the mediaeval ideas of scholarship, which influence our own orthodox education. The Greek concept was based on the oriental quest of the spirit through the body; the will was stimulated through bodily movement, mathematics and philosophy were expected to be the outcome of bodily culture, geometry by the right use of the arms, music was the result of the development of good breathing and the circulation of the blood. Learning through sedentary absorption of instruction would have seemed deadening to the Greeks. They addressed the body for the sake of the complete person. The later, mediaeval, monastic ideal of the scholar, the man of knowledge — no longer the man of action and of bodily and practical skill — dominates the modern image of education. Steiner throws doubts on this image, because he thinks it is not in accord with the true nature of man and with the natural stages of child development. Steiner does not believe that organised sport is of tremendous value in development, except to introduce the child to the social mores of his contemporaries. What he does consider to be vitally important is to build a bridge between play and socially useful labour.

How can play and work be connected? By progressing from play activity to artistic activity, which then leads to socially useful work. Since it is in the nature of children to be active, their activity, their play, gradually leads to work. Steiner believes that the transition can be guided in such a way that work never becomes a burden. He believes that the link is the artistic impulse, and this impulse has to be present in all teaching, not only in the art classes. He believes that the aesthetic impulse is universal, and one can see it in all folkwork, in cooking, dressmaking, furnishing. I would accept the fact that the sequence of PLAY — ART — WORK has great importance for decision-making about the physical environment for children. For example,



children learn by observation and by imitation, but the town planning segregation of work into industrial zones makes it difficult for children to observe people at work. It is a matter of scale; small workshops should be accessible to home areas, and to the school. The school should not be the centre of a dormitory neighbourhood, but should be the link between the home and the world at large, on the periphery of the home area. Thus it belongs to the town as a whole. Nor should children be regarded as trespassers on building sites and other work sites, which means, of course, that one accepts some degree of trouble and expense to make them welcome. However, expense and loss of efficiency may well be compensated for by the work that young people are willing and capable to do. In many societies adolescents are part of the community at work, and they enjoy this role.

The Maori child

In his essay, *A Sense of Belonging**, Eric Schwimmer describes a Mormon Maori community where tasks were handed to groups of children, and they acted with self-reliance. In the group they learned success and failure in doing a job: milking, fishing, looking after young children. They learned conforming behaviours and learned to appreciate ritual. Yet these same children became shy and tongue-tied with individual school teachers. They found the pupil role, with its accent on self discipline and bettering one's self, distasteful to them. Even after school group life retained strong attraction for them. The same interest in group life can also be seen in other Polynesians, and also amongst Pakeha New Zealanders. But for young people of this type the urban environment is singularly unresponsive.

* *Education*, 15, 1, 1966.

I pursued this topic, especially in relation to Maori children, in conversations with Mere Penfold, a Lecturer in Anthropology at the University of Auckland, and noted the following points:

1. 'Accept the fact that the pub or tavern might well become a new marae.'
   It is a fact of life that the tavern is something like a community centre, and people will be more responsible, if one stopped pussy-footing, and faced that fact. Fathers will go to the pub. If play areas were near, and there was also a drop-in for teenagers such as the 'kids barn' in Avondale, then it could all be a big family affair.

2. 'We need to give them more space and time. It is all part of not hurrying our children into growing up.'
   Concrete and asphalt physically jar on Maoris, and noise and lack of space drain them of spirit, while lack of spontaneity irks them. Maoris will use any opportunity to come together, and the human coming-together compensates for some of the bleakness of the scene. Meeting places should be so located that complaints by neighbours are minimized. Play Centre, Health and Welfare offices should be close to one another, and be part of the local centre, but that does not mean a single building, labelled 'Community Centre'. It may also be preferable to have them close to school or college, or even combined with it, but it is more important that they should be central to the community as a whole.

3. 'The rural maraes are used as they have never been used before.'
   Mere Penfold also emphasised the need of the older children to return frequently to the country, and to the home marae of their family. These children feel a need for service, and the educational system should formally recognise service to their community as part of their education, and count it in evaluating school results. Fire fighting, farm and fishery work, pioneering work for Ohu communities, building work for the rural marae; these should qualify for certificates of competence.

Conclusion

It is possible to exaggerate the importance of the urban physical environment and its effects on young people. It is certainly secondary to the social environment, and may even be of trivial importance in situations of great deprivation and poverty.

Children are nonetheless aware of it, and the essays did show that the older the children the tougher, more sarcastic and 'alienated' they were. Several said that the 'equipment' they wanted were 'bombs' or 'Patton tanks'. Others made a definite connection between 'nothing to do and nowhere to go' and teenage disaffection or destructiveness. I am reminded of the American architectural student who said:

> Go far enough — enough people,
> the right momentum, and a city
> is just fine. A little too
> much, and you got hell.

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